



CalFresh Expansion to SSI: Online Application

Background: GetCalFresh.org

The CDSS CalFresh and Nutrition Branch is committed to assisting counties in improving the customer experience for all CalFresh applicants and recipients. Beginning June 1, 2019, CalFresh customers will include SSI recipients. In an effort to assist counties, the CDSS CalFresh and Nutrition Branch developed a Framework of Solutions designed to assist counties as they prepare to welcome SSI recipients to CalFresh. As part of this Framework of Solutions for Customer Experience and Access, we identified three main avenues for clients to apply: Call, Click, and Come In.

The "Click" portion of the Framework includes utilization of online application assistance tools, such as GetCalFresh.org.

This application assistance tool will be active in all 58 counties as of June 1, 2019. Counties who were already active partners with GetCalFresh have seen a significant increase in online application volume. The expansion of the applicant pool to include SSI recipients will certainly drive application counts even higher after June 1, 2019.

Given that the volume of online applications may initially present a challenge for some counties, the County Technical Assistance Team offers several strategies to successfully address these challenges and improve the customer experience for all, including SSI recipients. The strategies listed here are designed to help your county maximize capacity and ensure timely processing of client applications.

Strategies for handling significantly increased volume of online applications

Overtime

Adding staff may not be an option in the short term due to the time it takes to post, recruit, and train new workers, but you can certainly give existing staff an opportunity for overtime if your county will allow. Employees earn extra income, the workload is kept manageable, and clients receive benefits timely. It's a win-win-WIN!

Early Checkout

If your procedure is to check the incoming application queue at specific intervals throughout the day, consider increasing the frequency of the queue reviews to avoid backlogs of applications. Ensure that the pending queue is not the bottleneck in the process. Do this BEFORE June 1st.

Expedited Service (ES) Screening Protocols

Ensure your business process allows for screening for Expedited Service prior to setting appointments for interviews. Simply scheduling every interview within three days of application receipt is not necessarily the optimal use of your processing resources. Maximize the efficiency of those resources by prioritizing applications that are potentially eligible for ES; schedule appointments for non-ES applications in the future to make room for more ES applications. Maintaining ES processing timeliness might mean adjusting processing expectations for non-ES applications during these high-volume periods.

Don't hesitate to use "date of discovery" for applications that may contain minimal information that makes screening for ES impossible. Courtesy calls to attempt to gather enough information for ES screening are excellent customer service; however, if contact with the client can't be made quickly, then consider setting the appointment outside the ES parameters and process for ES when/if the client interview is completed.

All Hands On-Deck

Many counties have listed this strategy in their Readiness Plan. Staff that are normally tasked with ongoing case maintenance may need to be temporarily re-assigned to online processing functions; supervisors and even program managers may be called upon to process applications as well. It's a team effort!